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ABSTRACT

Recent trends in immigration and foreign student enrollments are placing a growing demand on community colleges for English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction. A 1991 study of course sections at 164 two-year colleges nationwide revealed that ESL had grown from 30% of all foreign language courses offered in 1983 to 51% in 1991, and that the number of colleges offering ESL courses had grown from 26% in 1975 to 40% in 1991. ESL students tend to be concentrated in urban areas, and, frequently, foreign students from a particular language group settle in the same geographic area, making it easier for community colleges to profile their local ESL populations. The educational backgrounds of ESL students range from those unable to read and write in their native language to students with college degrees. Given the varied backgrounds of ESL students, community colleges have often developed ESL programs that respond to the specific needs of their local ESL population. Clark College in Washington established one ESL program for foreign students, and a separate ESL program for American immigrant and limited English proficient students. Most commonly, ESL programs include instruction in listening comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar. Vocational ESL programs, which weave English language skills into vocational subject areas, have also been established at a number of two-year colleges. ESL students often require special assistance to complete transfer and vocational programs. To address the language-related problems of its growing ESL population, Golden West College in California established a volunteer program to provide guidance in such areas as study skills, note-taking, self-esteem, and dealing with social service agencies. (PAA)

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ESL POPULATION AND PROGRAM PATTERNS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Recent trends in immigration and foreign student enrollments are placing a growing demand on community colleges for English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. In 1988, the U.S. Department of Commerce reported 4,710,655 immigrant arrivals to the U.S., the highest number since 1924. In California, the state with the highest growth in the LEP (limited English proficient) population, 5,478,712 people reported speaking Spanish at home. Of these, 32.5% also reported speaking English "not well" or "not at all." This figure represents an 89.8% increase from 1980 to 1990. Among Asian, Pacific Island, and Other Language speakers in California, the percentage speaking English "not well" or "not at all" increased an astounding 100.8% between 1980 and 1990 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990). Adding to the demand that these populations create for ESL classes is a record-number of people residing in the U.S. with F-1 (student) visas. In 1991-92, 419,585 F-1 visa students were attending U.S. colleges and universities, the highest number ever admitted (Watkins, 1992). While these students tend to enter four-year institutions, a substantial number do attend those community colleges which have favorable enrollment policies.

Curriculum and Enrollment Trends

A 1991 Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) study, sponsored by the National Center for Academic Achievement and Transfer, offers evidence of two-year colleges' responsiveness to the need for ESL instruction. Course sections in six major liberal arts areas (humanities, English, fine and performing arts, sciences, mathematics and computer sciences, and the social sciences) were tallied and coded from a random sample of 164 community colleges nationwide. The six disciplines were divided into 55 subject areas and further divided into 245 sub-subject areas. The coding of ESL courses followed the pattern established in the first CSCC's 1975 curriculum study -- ESL was considered a sub-subject area of the larger subject area "Foreign Languages," which was part of the discipline "Humanities." In addition to numbers of course sections offered, average class size and national enrollment figures were calculated for each of the major subject areas.

The CSCC study found an increase of 15.3% in foreign languages as part of the total humanities curriculum between 1977 and 1991--an increase due solely to the rise in ESL. ESL has grown from 30% of all foreign language courses offered in 1983 to 51% in 1991. Total enrollment in all foreign language classes in 1991 was 460,700, of which 236,000 were ESL students. In addition, the percentage of community colleges offering ESL during Spring Term has grown from 26% in 1975 to 40% in 1991. These 1991 findings reflect a phenomenal fourteen-year growth in ESL in community colleges nationwide.

The ESL Student Population

ESL students tend to be concentrated in urban areas. Miami-Dade Community College reported an estimated 10,000 students on its four campuses in 1991. At El Paso Community College, full-time ESL students alone numbered 1,045, with 11% of the total student population taking an ESL course *for credit*. At Yuba College, located in a rural, agricultural part of California, ESL accounts for 12.3% of all liberal arts courses.

Linguistic backgrounds of students vary enormously. However, immigrant populations tend to settle in predictable geographic patterns, making it easier for community colleges to develop profiles of their local ESL populations. Gujarati-speakers, for example, immigrated in large numbers to an area around Passaic, New Jersey, and currently comprise a group second only to the Spanish-speaking ESL population at the Passaic County Community College. At Pasadena City College, 36% of its ESL student population speaks some dialect of Chinese. Not all patterns are predictable, however. At the Community College of Philadelphia, students come from 56 different countries, with 21% speaking Vietnamese, 16.7% Spanish, and 14% Russian.

Variations exist, too, in the educational backgrounds of students. Some have adequate listening comprehension and speaking abilities in English, but almost no reading and writing skills. Others are unable to read or write in either English or their native languages. Still others have university educations from their home countries and must learn English at an advanced level to obtain a specific goal.

Types of ESL Classes

Because ESL students' needs and backgrounds vary tremendously, diverse types of ESL programs have been developed by community colleges, with the type of program devised often contingent upon local conditions. Most commonly, ESL programs include instruction in listening comprehension, speaking, reading, writing and grammar. Clark College in Washington is one of a small number of community colleges that have established separate programs for F-1 visa students and for American immigrant and LEP students. College officials felt that the language and educational backgrounds and goals of these two groups were quite distinct. The emphasis in the ESL program for F-1 visa students is on intermediate and advanced level academic English skills, while the program for immigrant and LEP students concentrates on conversational English, reading, writing and American culture.

Some colleges, including the Community College of Philadelphia, have established "transitional" programs to motivate ESL students to continue with both their English and content

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area studies. At the advanced level, courses are offered in such areas as "ESL Psychology"; students who successfully complete the course receive the same credit as if they had taken a regular psychology course. "ESL Psychology" was carefully designed by ESL and psychology instructors--class size is smaller, and students are given extra assistance in the language skills they need to understand course material and successfully complete course requirements. While these courses demand greater resources from the college, officials at the Community College of Philadelphia point to their 20% increase in retention rate of ESL students as tangible proof of the program's success.

Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) programs have also been established in community colleges in response to local needs. VESL programs attempt to weave English language skills into vocational subject areas, often using ESL strategies and techniques to teach specific vocational content. At El Paso Community College, for example, the "Workplace Literacy Demonstration Project" was instituted as a cooperative project with a Texas division of Philips Industries, the J&J Register Company, in order to address specific goals of both the college and the company. Since 95% of the company's 300 workers were limited English proficient, a major goal of the project was to develop specific ESL job-related curricula to improve language and literacy skills (Kissack and Clymer-Spradling, 1990). At Miami-Dade Community College, a non-credit vocational ESL program is open to anyone with an employment history who needs more English to re-enter the workforce or to continue working.

Government legislation can also play a role in ESL instructional programs. Between 1986 and 1993, many community colleges expanded their ESL offerings as part of so-called "Amnesty Programs." The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) earmarked $4 billion in federal funds to be disseminated for the education and training of eligible legalized aliens. IRCA mandated that eligible legalized aliens receive 40 hours of instruction in English, U.S. civics and history in order to be successfully mainstreamed into the American workforce and society (Fujimoto, 1992). Community colleges, among other educational agencies, were eligible to receive IRCA funds, but the demand for classes far outstripped the capacity of educational institutions to offer enough classes. Several sources report very little real education resulting from the IRCA. Fujimoto (1992) reported that a sample of 14,000 Amnesty-eligible students in California averaged about 9 hours of education per year from the State Legalized Immigrant Assistance Grant during the five-year grant period and Scott-Skillman and Ali (1991) estimated that California community colleges were prepared to serve only 25% of the population which desired such classes.

ESL students often require special assistance to complete community college transfer and vocational programs. Both immigrant and F1-visa students may need assistance in finding housing, or making needed cultural adjustments to U.S. society. Other common language-related problems include understanding professors, homework, written directions on tests, and assigned readings (Crepeau, 1991), and an unwillingness to speak aloud in class, share assignments aloud, or respond to teacher questions (Kelley and Sweet, 1991). Golden West College in California has developed a program to address such concerns. Its Community Volunteer Program has enlisted the help of almost 100 volunteers to assist the college's growing ESL population with problems in study skills, note-taking, academic skills, English-language fluency, in understanding American culture, self-esteem, and dealing with social agencies. In order for ESL students to meet the challenge of successfully completing regular transfer program coursework, community colleges may have to develop innovative ways of providing similar academic and cultural support services.

Conclusion

Given the projections for continued growth in ESL populations, many community colleges, especially those in urban areas, will be faced with the task of devising coherent programs and policies. Decisions concerning whether to provide separate programs for American ESL students and F1-visa ESL students, or whether to develop a VESL program rather than a more traditional program, will depend on the goals of the local population and the resources of the college. Keeping abreast of national trends in immigration and foreign student enrollment is essential if community colleges are to have programs and policies in place to anticipate new waves of incoming ESL students, rather than being overwhelmed by them.

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